1995 10 25 Wednesday Walt Umenhofer Whale of a Tale

WALT UMENHOFER

AB: "There was, and is, every now and then a game I play called *Truth or Trash*. In it people will call up and tell incredible stories. Many times lying frankly their little teeth off. And then it's up to the panel to decide if or not the story is true. Well, this was about, I don't know, maybe a year ago when somebody called me and told me this story about ... a pretty fantastic story ... about a whale washing up on a beach in Oregon and Oregonians not being the brightest bunch up there turned the ... with the theory that, ah, whales like roads being big, um, you know, big whale, big road ... the government there decided that they would turn the project over to the highway department to dispose of ... and it was, oh, it was a gigantic whale!

Well, I as much told the person that, uh, they spoke with fork-ed [sic] tongue, 'cause I just frankly didn't believe the story of what happened to this whale, and, ah ... See the highway department, I …my wife wants to know if we, you know, if maybe we can, you know, find out ... that after given the project we speculate that they probably got together in a ... you know a bunch of highway guys in a bar somewhere and said: 'Well, what the hell are we gonna do? And, ah ... ah, one of them said: 'Why look, don't we blow the thing up? I mean, just absolutely blow it up and, uh, we're gonna find out if that part of the story could be true.

Anyway, subsequently they did blow the whale up and, ah, it was a ... it was ... it was like the *WKRP* [*in Cincinnati* TV show] turkey story times ten (10). Um, all I can tell you is a lot lies ahead.

One of the larger – or largest, I guess … well, larger pieces of whale blubber blown to smithereens came down right on top of the car of a guy named Walt Umenhofer. And, as much of this story is myth and legend, ah, as anything else for a lot of people out there right now, we are going to bring it to real true life. And I've done this in two (2) ways:

One, I've got Walt Umenhofer on the line. Walt says there's a lot of the story that hasn't been told … yet (!), that never really got out. So we're going to lay it out in excruciating detail for you shortly with Walt.

And then the second thing I did is: Somebody once was kind enough to send me a hi- … a pretty good video, ah, from Channel Two (2) KATV television in Portland. And I've wished and wished and wished there would be a way that I could bring you this. You know obviously I can't give you the *video*, but Channel 2 can and plans to, and I'll tell you about

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

that. What they have done is given me permission to run the Channel 2 Portland Report that ran oh so long ago, called *A Whale of a Tale*.

And, by the way, Channel 2 plans – now here I'll give 'em a plug – plans *A Whale of a Tale* as part of a great anniversary celebration to air. So you people in Portland, whatever you do, do not miss it. Wednesday, November 1st in their newscast at 5 and 6:30 and 11 p.m. with the series airing Thursday and Friday, November 2nd and 3rd at 5, 6:30, and 11.

And, uh, the people up at Channel 2 were great and they sent me, ah, permission to air the narrative port, ah, part of KATV's story. So you're going to also hear that this hour.

* * *

AB: "In a moment *A Whale of a Tale*. Walt Umenhofer is gonna tell us about it."

* * *

AB: "Now, up to the state of Oregon where Walt Umenhofer – and I hope I've got that name right – continues to reside. Hi, Walt!"

WU: "How ya doin'?"

AB: "Is … ah, you're still in Oregon, right?"

WU: "Yes. Um-hmm."

AB: "Even after all that occurred?"

WU: (laughs) "It's a good place to live."

AB: "Um, you've been not an easy guy to find and I've got to thank one of my listeners – maybe a friend of yours, ah, who heard the talk about it on this show and supplied me finally with your number.

Ah, how long ago, Walt did this occur? I mean, it's myth and legend by now."

WU: "It's twenty-five (25) years I think this … in November."

AB: "In November?"

WU: "Yeah."

AB: "Well I guess that's why, ah, Channel 2 is doing the big special on it. Twenty-five (25) years ago.

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

Um, what in the world happened back then? I mean, we know this … I saw it on TV. A gigantic whale washed ashore where?"

WU: "In … in Florence, Oregon."

AB: "Florence …"

WU: "On the coast."

AB: "Uh-huh. And so, somehow … I don't know where you entered the picture. I mean, did you see the whale and know about the whale before you …"

WU: "No, what … what happened, Art, is … is at that time I worked for a national company and we had a plant here in Springfield, Oregon. And we were planning to build a … a kind of a satellite plant in the Florence area to … to utilize all the wood waste from the mills in that area down there.

And why I went to Florence in the first place … we didn't want anybody to know we were down there. We were down there lookin' for property."

AB: "Ahh …"

WU: So we didn't want a … ah, you know how property goes when they know you're lookin' for property – always something becomes a lot more expensive."

AB: "That's right."

WU: "So we had been talking to Wilbur Ternyik, who was the Port Commissioner at that time. I believe he's Port Commissioner again. He's been Mayor since, and I believe he's the Port Commissioner. Heluva nice guy!"

AB: "Ahh!"

WU: "So, I got the local air pollution guy, Vern Atkinson, and I had a realtor by the name of Art Wickham, and my twelve (12) year-old son. And we had an appointment with Wilbur at nine o'clock in the morning (9:00 a.m.). So … we got in the car and we drove down to Florence and we went to the Port Commissioner office, and I walked in and announced that we were there. And they said: 'Well, Mr. Ternyik isn't here.' I said: 'What do you mean he isn't here? We have an appointment at nine o'clock (9:00).'"

AB: "Right."

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

WU: "And we were, by the way, we were also tryin' … we were gonna promote a port revenue bond. That's the reason we were workin' through the Port Commissioner.

So I says: 'Well, where is he?'

'Well, he's out … out at the north jetty. There's a whale washed ashore out there, so …'

AB: "Hmmm …"

WU: "Well, we got all the information. We said: 'What the hell, we're here – let's go see the whale! Well, sure …"

AB: "Why not?"

WU: We drove out there. It's quite a ways out there. And it was a large, paved parking lot. And you can't see the ocean, because it's a very … there's a huge dune between the parking and … and the ocean itself."

AB: "Ah!"

WU: "So we pulled into the parking lot and it … it just happened to be one (1) spot left, so we pulled the car in there and … and we proceeded to walk and go up over top of this dune.

When we got to the top of the dune, you could … you looked down at the … the, ah, the water's edge and sure enough, there he was! (WU laughs). It was a twenty ton (20 ton = 40,000 lbs.) sperm whale."

AB: "Twenty (20) tons!"

WU: "That's what they estimated."

AB: "Oh well, I'm sure it was every bit of that. It looked, ah, I saw people standing next to it and they were dwarfed!"

WU: "Yeah."

AB: "I mean, this was big!"

WU: "So, we were able to … fortunately get down there. They were kinda keepin' people back, but … but, ah, Vern Atkinson, the air pollution guy, knew Wilbur quite well and we were able to go right down there to where actually where the whale was. And the smell you couldn't believe! You

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

couldn't believe the smell of this thing. I don't know how long this thing had been dead, but it came ashore and … and, uh, it was just … it was just awful!"

AB: "It was on its way."

WU: "Yeah, it was pretty bad!"

AB: "Um-hmm."

WU: "Somebody the night before had taken a chainsaw and cut the lower jaw off to get the teeth. I understand the teeth are ivory."

AB: "Ahh … oh, no kidding? (!)"

WU: "Yeah. Somebody had ripped off the … the whole jaw!"

AB: "So it was a mutilated twenty (20) ton whale?"

WU: (laughs). "Yesss. (laughs). So we … we kinda stood around there and chatted around there, and they had the people there from the highway department and … and we were all kinda talkin' together.

You know, I says: 'Well, what're you gonna do?' And, uh, this fellow that's from the highway department, he says: 'Well,' he says, 'I'm gonna blow it up!'

And I thought: 'Well, you know … okay, not a problem.'

So we stood there a while longer abd all of a sudden this Caterpillar tractor came rumblin' down across the sand with a … with a huge bucket on the front of it. Now in this bucket was twenty (20) cases of sixty percent (60%) powder!"

AB: "Oooh!"

WU: "So I seen that and I said: 'Boy, this is … this is gonna be big trouble.' So I said to this guy: 'Tell me what the hell you gonna do with twenty (20) cases of dynamite?'"

AB: "Yeah."

WU: "He says: 'I'm gonna blow it out to sea!' And I *thought*: (AB laughs) "Yeah? You're gonna blow it out to sea …' I says … and I says: 'Where did you ever come up with this formula?" And he says he talked to

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

somebody and they said: 'Rule of thumb – case of dynamite per ton a [of] whale.'

That's what …"

AB: "Per ton of whale!"

WU: "Yeah, that's what … that was his formula."

AB: "Now I wonder if they might have derived that from actually per ton of rock that you wanta displace?"

WU: "I … I have no idea."

AB: "Because how would you calculate a whale?"

WU: "He says: 'I'm gonna dig on the in-…inboard side of the whale and put cases of dynamite … I'm gonna blow him out to sea.'

Well, powder doesn't work that way. And … and, uh, I got into quite … well you might say almost an argument about this. I said: 'You're crazy! You're gonna kill somebody!' I says: 'You know, if you want to obliterate the whale … you wanta blow up a big rock with dynamite, you put a few sticks of dynamite on the top and put some sand on top and you *crack it*. You never go underneath!"

AB: "Uh-huh."

WU: "Especially with sand, because sand is so dense. All the powder you have is going to go straight up!"

AB: "Hmmm …"

WU: "Anyhow, Vern Atkinson and Wilbur said to me: 'Come on, how the highway does it, it's really none of your business anyhow.'

And I says: 'Yeah …'

And the guy from the highway department says … he says: 'Anyhow, I'm gonna have everybody on top of them dunes up there.'"

AB: "I … I'm … I'm just curious, Walter. How did you know so much or I mean … ?"

WU: "I've … I've had quite a bit of experience, even in the military with … with explosives."

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

AB: "Explosives, yeah."

WU: "And, ah … so I said … he says: 'I'm gonna have everybody on top of those dunes up there. And I says: 'Yeah, and I'm gonna be the furtherest SOB [son of a bitch] on the south end!'" (AB smirks and laughs).

And I really was! And Vern and Ternyik went with me. And everybody went way down the south end of this thing. And they made a, you know, kind of a … A Big Spectacle!

They put the dynamite in there, and run around with the reel of wire, and then they waved their hardhats for the 'All Clear,' and they signaled one another and what have you. And let me tell you – they touched that sucker off and it looked like a *nuclear explosion (!)*"

AB: "Ahh …"

WU: "When you see the tape you'll … you'll know what I'm sayin'."

AB: "I was reminded of a fuel-air explosion or somethin' short of … or near a nuclear explosion. It was unbelievable!"

WU: "Yeah. It was a huge mushroom cloud!"

AB: "Hah! Hah! Hah!"

WU: "And this thing was red and black and white, and just unbelievable! And the big pieces, of course, went on beyond the mushroom cloud. They kinda went way up higher.

And all these people … you have to visualize a hundred (100) people or more standin' on top of the dune. And of course the wind comes in from the ocean. The wind is absolutely westerly!"

AB: "That's right, it does that. It does that."

WU: "And all of a sudden, everybody realized: 'Oh God! (AB laughs). Here it comes!"

AB: In other words, they were blown to such a high altitude that the wind began to grab them."

WU: "Ohh, this stuff started movin' in … And people started screamin' … And running … And smell (!) You couldn't … you'll never believe the smell!"

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

AB: (laughs). "Well you know, I understand actually before they began running, right after the explosion everybody for at least a few moments rejoiced and clapped and yelled!"

WU: "Oh, it was fun! Yeah, it looked neat!"

AB: "It was like Hallo- … Halloween!"

WU: "It was kind of a panic affair."

AB: "Fourth of July times ten (10)!"

WU: "Yeah, but … but here it come and I mean to tell ya … And we were the furtherest ones down and it was startin' to hit us already!

And … and I was standin' there and I'm lookin' up, and I see one (1) big piece … and it was just kinda floatin' around up there (AB laughs) and flippin' around up there."

AB: "Way up there!"

WU: "And that sucker … it just came to an absolute stop!"

AB: "Kinda calm, huh?"

WU: "And it straightened itself out, you might say, and it came straight down!"

AB: "Just like a Road Runner cartoon!"

WU: "It hit my car dead center …"

AB: "Your car? … it figures."

WU: "I had just bought this – Ninety Eight Olds – it was a gold four-door Regency …"

AB: Oh, nooo …"

WU: "And the people I bought it from was Dunham's Oldsmobile in Eugene here, and their slogan by the way is *'A Whale of a Deal'* (!)"

AB: "Hah! Ha-ha!" (WU laughs) (AB laughs).

WU: "Now that thing … and it hit my car with such force …"

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

AB: "Yes?"

WU: "… that it exploded! There wasn't a piece of glass bigger than the quarter of an inch (1/4 in.)."

AB: "Oh? My God!"

WU: "And it pushed the roof so hard down to the flat part of the seat that you sit in. And … and just kind of bent the car. I don't know what this piece weighed, probably four or five hundred pounds (400-500 lbs.)."

AB: "I saw the photo of your car, ah, Walt, and …"

WU: "Yeah."

AB: "… I presume they declared it a total loss …"

WU: "Yeah!

So, I had … fortunately nobody was hurt. The reason this story is funny, Art, is because the car next to mine had some little children in it."

AB: "Uh-huh."

WU: "So the story is funny because nobody got hurt at this point."

AB: "It could have …"

WU: "If people …"

AB: "… hit that other …"

WU: "… the people were screamin' and runnin', and I don't know … all their clothes were ruined. (AB laughs). And there's no way to get this smell out of that."

AB: "Um … it even I guess, you know, the camera crew, which could have stayed in place bravely like those under fire, decided valor was better. I …"

WU: "Everybody … yeah!"

AB: "And they just flat stopped taking pictures and took off!"

WU: "See ... so I got down there ... The people got to my car first before ... 'cause we were the furtherest ones down there."

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

AB: "Hmm. That's right. You had said you would be the furtherest away."

WU: "The guy from the ... everybody come out from ... this Jeep around with all these hardhat officials – 'Oh My God, whose car is this?'

'Well, (AB laughs) it's mine, you SOB.'"

AB: "Yeah."

WU: "He says: 'Well, come into our office.'

I says: 'I'm not goin' to your office.' I says: 'I'm gonna call the Governor!'"

AB: (laughs) "The Governor, huh?"

WU: "I couldn't get ahold of the Governor, but I got ahold of the guy that run the Highway Commission, and I started tellin' him the story and he says I gotta stop. He says: 'Ya gotta tell me,' he says, 'did anybody get hurt?'

And I said: 'No.' And he said: 'Because I have to stop. I have ...' he says: 'This is the funniest story I ever heard in my life!'" (AB laughs).

AB: "Well, is there any way that you know other than what you told us about the decisionmaking of this? Somehow I mean you figure this gets turned over to the highway department and, you know, 'the guys'?"

WU: "The guys ...?"

AB: "The guys with the dynamite. They start chewin' it over ... they start chewin' it over tryin' to figure out how to get rid of this whale. And I just really would like to know how they came to the decision to blow it up."

WU: "I don't have any idea how they came to that decision, but, ah, the ... the tape that the San Francisco news channel did – they interviewed quite a few people on ... on the tape – and ... and, ah, they said the written report that this fellow wrote said everything went according to plan (!) (AB and WU laugh).

And then ... and then they said: 'What happens when you're in a bureaucracy when everything goes according to plan?' They said: 'Six (6) months later, he got promoted (!)"

AB: "He got promoted! (WU laughs).

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

You know, there's a sort of a thread, ah, you say that was twenty-five (25) years ago, huh?"

WU: "Yeah."

AB: "It still seems to work that way today!"

WU: "It's worse ... it's worse than it's ever been!"

AB: "Yeah ... it may be."

WU: "You know, right after this happened – maybe a year after – I got a call from *Sports Illustrated*."

AB: "Really!"

WU: "I was living in Louisville then."

AB: "Um-hmm."

WU: "And ... they wanted to know, you know, if I had any objections to them doin' this story on the whale, and I said: 'I have no objections at all.'

So the fella, he worked on it – I still have a copy of it somewhere – and he called me. It was midnight in Louisville, and he called me from Eugene, and he said he had just come back from Florence or ... or wherever this George lived. And he said: 'I just have to tell you what he said.' And I said: 'What'd he say?'

He says: 'Well, it's typical bureaucrat,' he says: 'I didn't use enough powder.' (!) (AB laughs). 'If I had used more dynamite, there wouldn't have been any big pieces.'" (AB laughs more / WU laughs).

AB: "All right."

* * *

AB: "Good morning, everybody! I am Art Bell. My guest is blubber-victim, Walt Umenhofer. Twenty-five (25) years ago it happened. Today the explosion still resonates.

In a moment, you will *hear* that explosion and the Channel 2 report from Portland, that describes the whole thing in impossibly funny detail. It's incredible!"

* * *

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

AB: "This all those many years ago was the actual KATU Channel 2 news report of *The Whale of a Tale*, the exploding whale story that, ah ... ah, many people have thought ... in fact, I recall now the [Truth or Trash] panel thought was absolutely a whale of a tale, but a lie.

Well guess what? It wasn't a total lie and here's Channel 2's report from way back then: [TR = Television Reporter]

TR: "It had to be said the Oregon State Highway Division not only had a whale of a problem on its hands, it had a stinking whale of a problem. What to do with one forty-five foot (45 ft.), eight ton (16,000 lbs.) whale dead on arrival on the beach near Florence.

It had been so long since a whale had washed up in Lane County, nobody could remember how to get rid of one. In selecting its battle plan, the highway division decided the carcass couldn't be buried because it might soon be uncovered, and couldn't be cut up and then buried, because nobody wanted to cut it up, and it couldn't be burned. So dynamite it was, some twenty (20) cases or a half ton of it.

The hope was that the long dead Pacific gray whale would be almost disintegrated by the blast and that any small pieces still around after the explosion would be taken care of by seagulls and other scavengers. Indeed, the seagulls have been standing nearby all day.

As everything was being made ready, we asked George Thornton, the highway engineer in charge of the project, for his final observations:"

GT: "Well, I'm confident that it'll work. The only thing is we're not sure just exactly how much explosives it'll take to disintegrate this thing, so the scavengers – seagulls and crabs and whatnot – can clean it up."

TR: "Is there any chance it might be more than a one-day job?"

GT: "Ah, if there's any large chunks left and, um, we may have to do some other clean-up ... possibly set another charge."

TR: "The dynamite was buried primarily on the leeward side of the big mammal, so as most of the remains would be blown toward the sea. About seventy-five (75) bystanders, most of them residents who had first found the whale to be an object of curiousity before they tired of its smell, were moved back a quarter (1/4) of a mile away. The sand dunes there were covered with spectators and landlubber newsmen, shortly to become 'land-blubber' newsmen, but the blast blasted blubber beyond all believable bounds."

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

AB: (laughs) "What's going on now on the screen is a countdown: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ... (Sound of Explosion!) [CV = Crowd Voices]

CV: "'Whee! Look at ... Oh, ah, ah, ah ...' (sound of people running)."

TR: "Our cameras stopped rolling immediately after the blast. The humor from the entire situation suddenly gave way to a run for survival as huge chunks of whale blubber fell everywhere (!) Pieces of meat passed high over our heads, while others were falling at our feet. The dunes were rapidly evacuated as spectators escaped both the falling debris and the overwhelming smell.

A parked car over a quarter of a mile from the blast site was the target of one large chunk – the passenger compartment literally smashed! Fortunately no human was hit as badly as the car. However everyone on the scene was covered with small particles of dead whale.

As for the success of the effort, well the seagulls who were supposed to clean things up were nowhere in sight, either scared away by the explosion or kept away by the smell. That didn't really matter – the remaining chunks were of such a size that no respectable seagull would attempt to tackle anyway!

As darkness began to set in, the highway crews were back on the beach burying the remains, including a large piece of the carcass which never left the blast site.

It might be concluded that should a whale ever wash ashore in Lane County again, those in charge will not only remember what to do, they'll certainly remember what not to do!"

AB: (laughs). "So, ah, ... (AB and WU laugh) that was the report."

* * *

AB: "Look, ah ... ah, this report has only, ah, at one (1) other time in all its twenty-five (25) year history been released to anybody to run and that was to, I think, KGO in San Francisco that did a piece on it. And so, I feel very honored that, ah, KATU allowed us to run it. Ah, they're very nice people up there in Portland ... And, um, thanks to Doug Brazil. the, ah, news director, and everybody else at KATU. It was a rare opportunity and I'm glad we could provide it for you."

* * *

AB: "Well, Walt, there it was ... ah, sound familiar?"

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

WU: “You know one thing that’s always puzzled me about this is it’s a known fact that if you ... if you get under- ... underneath the bureaucrats and get ’em all upset about something, you usually get an IRS audit.”

AB: “Heh.”

WU: “What I never could understand is: I was the only one who protested what this guy was doin’, how the hell he ever directed that piece of whale to the top of my car, but he did it.”

AB: “Did you get audited?”

WU: “No.” (WU laughs).

AB: “No?”

WU: (continues laughing).

AB: “Um, did they promptly pay up? I mean, he ...”

WU: “They paid me in two (2) days!”

AB: “In two (2) days?”

WU: “Yeah. I got a ... I got a check in two (2) days. I think what they were really afraid of: This thing had really made the newspapers and the AP wire service – and I had people from Germany send me the newspapers from relatives I have over there. And, I think what this ... what they were afraid of is probably all these people could have sued them ... at least for new clothes. (AB laughs).

But when we got home ... we had to rent a car to go home in ...”

AB: “Yes?”

WU: “And we had ... and it was cold and we had to have the win- ... all the windows down all the way home. That’s how bad it [the smell] was.”

AB: “Now, when you ...”

WU: “Vern Atkinson, who ... who is not living anymore and was a heluva guy ... this is so funny because he went in the garage and his wife come out and she made him strip naked in the garage ...”

AB: “Ha!”

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

WU: " ... and wouldn't let him in the house." (AB and WU laugh).

AB: "Um, now, ah, you know you lookin' back at this and it's obvious you can laugh, but on the day that it actually happened, did ... did ... did people at that moment see the ... really see the humor in this, or I'm talkin' about the group that was actually there and had all this stuff fallin' on 'em. They weren't laughin'."

WU: "It wasn't funny at all. And it's absolutely *amazing* that no one was seriously injured. I mean, and that's what I tried to tell this guy when he was doin' it, and ... and the Port Commissioner and Vern told me it was none of my business.

I says: 'Look, they're gonna kill somebody, you know? But as luck has it, it turned out to be a funny story, but: 'Thank God!'"

AB: "Ah, indeed."

* * *

Aud: "Yeah, a quick comment first: Do you know ... is it the first time something like this has happened?"

WU: "I think ... I think it was done once before."

Aud: "Right, northern California when I was in college in 1978, ah, my professor told us about an instance in northern California when they tried to blow a whale up. Same kind of thing."

AB: "When they *tried*?"

Aud: "Yeah, it didn't, um, it just kinda splattered, he said. It wasn't quite as, ah, quite a big show as what happened up in Oregon. Just kind of splattered all over the place and the main carcass was still left!" (Aud laughs).

AB: "Has anybody, I'm ... I'm ... I'm curious, ah, anybody come up with an actual good way to dispose of a whale? I saw at the end they sort of buried it in the sand."

Aud: "I think that's what they did in this case too. It's just ... it's an impossible situation."

AB: "In other words, whales don't ... would you say that Walt that whales don't really ... well, I ... I ... it blew up – part of it blew up, but there was so much of it left ..."

WU: "I think better than half of it was still intact."

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

AB: "Uhh? Then whales don't blow up easily."

WU: (laughs). "No."

AB: "No."

* * *

Aud: "Was there anyone that yelled, ah, 'Thar she blows!' ?"

WU: (WU and AB laugh). "I don't think so. (AB laughs).

Probably would have been a good idea."

Aud: "Okay."

AB: "Okay, thanks! Was there any kind of countdown? The television supplied one, Walt. It was very dramatic.

But was there any kind of countdown they did otherwise on the site?"

WU: "I don't think so. All I remember is them waving their hats at one, you know, and 'All Clear.'"

AB: "How 'bout 'Fire in the hole!' or somethin' like that?"

WU: "Yeah, they shoulda yelled something." (AB and WU laugh).

* * *

Aud: "Now what about these environmentalists? Are all these guys goin' crazy 'cause someone blew up a whale?"

WU: "Well they would now, believe me."

Aud: "Biologists and everybody and they weren't screamin': 'Holy ...'?"

WU: "That was back in the days when ... when ... back in the 'good ol' days' – put it that way. Today they would probably scream: 'Bloody Murder!'"

Aud: "So there's no big protests when someone blew up a whale?"

WU: "No, no."

AB: "Now bear in mind, this whale had ... as Rush [Limbaugh] would say, assumed room temperature to ... to the point where it was hard to stand the stink in the vicinity. So ... I guess that's your answer."

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

* * *

Aud: "Hey, Walt!"

WU: "Yeah?"

Aud: "Sounds like a wild story there. I was ... I was tryin' to picture myself bein' in that thing. ...

And I'm trying to imagine watchin' this whale blow up and all the stuff's coming down. And I'm trying to decide: What ... do I run OR do I watch stuff fall and dodge the big ones?"

AB: "That's a good point! In other words, running you wouldn't see one comin' at 'cha. At least if you stood in one place and kinda dodged around a little bit, you'd have a ... that's a good point, Walt!"

WU: "Yeah, I ... that's what I kinda did! I stood there ... in fact, I watched the big piece ..."

AB: "Um-hmm."

WU: "... that hit my car.

I don't know the person that ever dodged it or not if it really come at ya. That stuff was movin' pretty fast!

Aud: "Well, that's what I was tryin' to figure out. (Aud laughs). Dodge or run, which one would work." (Aud laughs).

* * *

AB: "You know, when you told it Walt – thank you, caller – it kinda reminded me I like Road Runner cartoons and ... and I used to watch cartoons where things would go up and you kinda pictured it as going way up and then sort of stopping ... and suspending for a moment."

WU: "That's exactly what it did." (AB laughs, then WU joins in laughing).

AB: "As it reached its highest point, ah ... ah, and then ... and then of course I suppose slowly – it would seem from the ground – that it would begin falling back toward you. That kind of deal?"

WU: (laughs in response).

AB: "Umm-hmm."

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

* * *

Aud: "Yeah, what kind of car was that?"

WU: "A ninety-Eight Regency."

Aud: "A what?"

WU: "A ... a Oldsmobile Regency."

Aud: "A Regency ..."

AB: "A brand new one too!"

WU: "Yeah!"

Aud: "A brand (Aud laughs), a brand new smelly Regency." (Aud snickers). "Okay, thank you."

AB: "... Yeah, a brand new one. Brand new! That must've been heartbreaking. I mean, you know, again (WU laughs) we can laugh now, but I know how you feel when you have a brand new car. Ah, there's nothing like it. It must have been *heartbreaking!*"

WU: "Actually, you know, it was a pretty serious thing until after it was over. Then we all ... but then it became funny when nobody was hurt."

AB: "Um, at the scene or later at home when you were laughin' about it?"

WU: "Later at home."

AB: "Uh-huh. Yeah."

* * *

Aud: "Ah, yeah, ah, this story kinda reminds me of when I ... the old days when I used to shoot a fireworks show – Class D explosives. And, uh, I was wirin' a ... a finale for a ... ah, oh, I'm tryin' to think of the place, ah ..."

AB: "Doesn't matter. Wherever it was, you were doin' a show."

Aud: "Yeah, and we were wirin' a finale and I was talkin' to this guy – old explosives guy – and, uh, he told me about a story when they were somewhere in Europe blowing bridges up, and he said: 'Ah, you know kid, when you want to blow somethin' up, my teacher told me: 'You figure out how much dynamite ya need and you double it.' And this guy reminds me of this guy tellin' me this story.'"

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

* * *

AB: "Is there actually Walt, any way to calculate how much dynamite it would have taken to – as they *wished* to do – obliviate or turn into little, tiny particles such ... ?"

WU: "I ... I ... I think what they should have done if they were gonna use explosives, you know, was put some – maybe a case or two (2) – in single sticks on top of the whale and put sand on top of it ..."

AB: "So ..."

WU: "... you would kind of blow it apart in place, more or less, and you'd still have to bury the pieces."

AB: "But at least you'd have smaller pieces to bury."

WU: "Yeah. Then, but, ah, this guy thought he was gonna ... by puttin' the dynamite on the inboard side ... he figured he was gonna blow the whole thing out in the ocean."

AB: "Hmm ..."

WU: "It didn't work that way."

AB: "Hmmm."

* * *

Aud: "About that whale ..."

AB: "Yes?"

Aud: "The right thing to do is put a bar across the whale."

AB: "Do what?"

Aud: "A steel bar."

AB: "A steel bar?"

Aud: "Yes. Put it across the whale."

AB: "Yes?"

Aud: "And then tie a rope and drag it out to sea. Then you blow it up."

WU: "That's what they probably could have done.

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

If ... if I remember that time, there was a pretty good-sized tug in Florence. And if they had just, you know, got a big net or somethin' and put around it and some dynamite in it, and drug it out a coupla' miles and then touched it off."

AB: "Well see, that's why I really ... the only part of this story that I don't have – and I wish I could get and I will pursue – is the genesis of it. When these guys were sittin' around, whether it was in an office or in a bar after work ... whatever, you know, how they came up with this? That would be good to know!"

WU: "Y-y-yeah!"

AB: "The minutes of the meeting where they planned it."

WU: "Well, somewhere he got a 'rule of thumb' – case of dynamite per ton a' [of] whale." (WU laughs).

AB: "Per ton of whale. (WU laughs).

I have ... did you spend a lot of time arguin' with him that this was not ... ?"

WU: "Yeah ... not, not ... well, I got cut off pretty quick, you know.

Ah, you don't argue with a ... with a bureaucrat when he's in charge!" (WU laughs).

AB: "And ..."

WU: "I cried. [?]"

AB: "... in the interview he seemed very confident. Very confident!"

WU: "Yes."

AB: "Now did you ... you must have seen that interview actually going on?"

WU: "Yeah, yeah."

AB: "Oh you did? So, ah, these ... there he was. Yeah, he looked pretty proud.

And his only attitude after all of this was over, reflectively, was that he had not used enough dynamite?"

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up

WU: "That's ... that's ... I ... that's what he told the guy from *Sports Illustrated*. (WU laughs).

AB: "Uh-huh."

* * *

Aud: "Well you know, I was thinking of some different stories waiting on the line, and I recall seeing some pictures of a friend ... that a friend brought back from, ah, Newfoundland one time.

I don't know how long or far into the winter season you were in, but they had a sperm whale, ah, wash up in their town that was fresh dead and the city made an activity out of utilizing every bit of the whale, as the old whalers did. The blubber, the bones, ... all for practical purposes."

AB: "Well, I think, ah, this is just hazarding a guess, but Walt, from what you've told me of the condition of the whale, ah, it's not somethin' you'd want to carve up and take home for the dinner table."

WU: "Yeah, *it was pretty rank!* I don't know how long the thing had been dead , but it was kinda *gooey*, you know." (WU laughs).

AB: "Oh my God! Gooey! That ... gooey ... Oh, that's awful!

Well listen, I don't know how to thank you, Walt ..."

WU: "Well, that's great!" (AB and WU laugh).

AB: "You have helped, um, correct ... actually verify what until now has been myth. So, bless your heart for staying up for this, Walt, and I, you know, something like that never would happen to somebody twice, but I'd be careful where I parked."

WU: "Okay."

AB: "Take care, partner."

WU: "See you later."

* * *

© 1995 Premiere Networks Inc.
The Art Bell Vault offers vintage, commercial-free Art Bell shows at coasttocoastam.com/sign-up